

Kansas City is a veteran in the game of competing for NCAA title events.

<http://www.connectsports.com/feature/what-it-takes-to-land-ncaa-championships/>

The town has a couple of attractive tangibles for the NCAA to consider; it is centrally-located, and has three major professional teams—MLB's Royals, NFL's Chiefs, and MLS charter member Sporting KC. Its history of hosting major tournaments and contests is perhaps the most important arrow in its quiver—its events industry knows what it's doing.

Still, Kansas City takes nothing for granted when bidding for more events, whether one of the largest, like a NCAA Division I Men's tournament regional site, or smallest, like Division III men's and women's soccer. It still prepares its bid presentations like a nervous rookie, and like a draft prospect, still sweats out the NCAA's site selection announcements. Prestige and dollars are the spoils, as well as rewards for many people who have worked hard for a goal.

For the most recent "awards" show, on Dec. 11, the NCAA picked a record 523 sites for 82 of its 89 championships from 2014 to 2018. No jaded participant, Kansas City decided to stage a selection announcement viewing party of the announcements at NCAA.com. Invited by the Kansas City Sports Commission and Foundation were community and bid partners, board members and bravest of all, all Kansas City media.

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Kansas City had bid for 20 events, and embarrassment akin to Chicago's on the day of the 2016 Olympic Games selection announcement was possible.

"It was risky not knowing if we would be awarded 20 championships or none," says Kathy Nelson, KCSC president and CEO. "I felt we had worked so hard as a team and engaged so many great people outside our organization that we were all in this together, win or lose."

The NCAA gave Kansas City 14 events over the four years, more than any other city, including the Division I men's soccer finals in 2015 and Division I women's volleyball finals in 2017. Nelson says the disappointment of losing events to other cities is lightened by the lessons learned and respect for competition.

"As a city we may have been disappointed at times, but what a great exercise in teamwork and resiliency," she says. "It was also very rewarding to see the success of my counterparts across the country. Sports commissions are a close group, and we all appreciate how difficult is it to put these bids together."

What goes in to convincing the NCAA to choose one city over another? Why do cities want to host these events, and do they guarantee the results hoped for? How does the NCAA decide? The NCAA received 1,984 bids for the most recent site selection process, begun in January, 2013, and input for this story from Kansas City, Indianapolis, Philadelphia, and the NCAA may help answer those questions.

Larry Needle, executive director of the Philadelphia Sports Congress, which helped the city win five championships over the next four years, says what officials of other cities say about keys to winning events: venues, budgets, and the experiences of the participants and fans are most important.

“It’s putting the right combination together for the NCAA: the right university with the right venue and the right experience for the student-athletes, and all within a financial package that works for all the parties,” Needle says.

“I think our success can be traced to a number of factors. First and foremost, it’s about the people. We’ve developed a tremendous partnership with the NCAA over the years, and have a great working relationship and history of delivering first-class events. Beyond that, it’s the entire package that Philadelphia is able to offer – from world-class venues, to a great hotel package and so much for our visitors to see and do – and all very accessible and in the country’s fourth largest media market.”

Needle and Susan Baughman, senior vice president at Indiana Sports Corporation, add another reason besides fame and fortune for cities to vie for NCAA title events: reflecting the interests of the region.

“I think one of the keys for us has been to focus on NCAA championships that will really resonate within the community,” says Needle. “Whether it’s been wrestling, lacrosse, basketball or (Division I hockey’s) Frozen Four, the events have generated tremendous buzz and really been well received locally.”

Says Baughman, “These events provide unique opportunities for the youth of our region and for our local community to be involved. They have also allowed us to promote certain growing sports here in Indiana, such as lacrosse. Recently, we have also been awarded water polo and fencing events, which will be new for our community and provide exciting new experiences.”

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The non-monetary benefits are crucial, because there have been academic studies that indicate the economic impact of hosting NCAA title events is overblown, with either no effect or a negative one. These studies say cities don’t factor in: the fact that events can keep local residents from spending money as they avoid crowds; the cost of staging the events; that supporters can overestimate crowd sizes and the multiplier effects, i.e., direct spending on an event boosts additional spending; underestimation of how much money would have been spent in the local economy without the event.

Cindy Smith, the KCSC vice president of business and partner development, says that answers regarding the topic of economic impact will vary by sports commission.

“We would be of the opinion that unless an in-person survey is conducted from a sampling of those attending an event, it is difficult to get an accurate number of direct and indirect spending by out of town guests as well as local attendees,” she says.

Smith provides examples from Kansas City’s experiences in the 21st century. Since 2000, Kansas City has hosted 11 NCAA championships. In 2003, it hosted the Division I wrestling finals, and conducted a survey that revealed \$5 million in economic impact. She says impact from the 2010 NCAA women’s volleyball final four– with a volleyball convention tied to the event –was estimated at \$5 million, though a survey was not conducted. Depending on the teams

assigned, she says, hosting an NCAA men's basketball second or third round is estimated at \$5 million to \$7 million.

"We do not know the economic impact of future NCAA events Kansas City will host," says Smith. "What we do know is the exposure received on television, and the opportunity to show off our city to a number of student athletes in future years, could well lead to future employees and residents, and all the events will lead to some degree of economic impact without operating at a loss."

NCAA director of championships and alliances Jeff Jarnecke says the NCAA tries to help each winning location in each stage of the hosting. It provides planning advice from experts in all related areas; funding opportunities for enhancements, signage, décor and marketing; site visits; event equipment; and broadcasting through either network partners or NCAA.com.

The NCAA tries to help hosts financially as well, he says. Revenue is generated at the host sites from ticket sales. Jarnecke says if there is any profit from gross ticket sales after expenses then that is shared with the host. If there is not sufficient revenue to cover the expenses, he says, the NCAA reimburses for all budgeted and approved expenses plus pays an honorarium so hosts do not lose any direct costs on staging an NCAA event. Hosts are able, in most instances, to keep all parking revenue and food and beverage revenue plus receive a commission from any programs and NCAA merchandise that is sold.

Economic impact is among the factors the NCAA considers during the 11-month selection process, says director of championships and alliances Jeff Jarnecke. The bid process has been streamlined, mainly through synchronicity and standardization; in the past, each sport's committee established its own timeline, criteria and term for bids.

For the most recent selections, the campaign was originally announced in January, 2013 with more specific information offered in April. From there, bid specifications were posted June 15; the bid portal opened July 15; bid intentions were due by August 9; and completed bids were to be submitted on or by September 16. From there, the various sport committees reviewed the bid responses and ultimately advanced their recommendations to the respective approving authority—Championships Cabinet for Division I; Championships Committee for Division II; and Championships Committee for Division III.

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The timelines and procedures are different only for the men's and women's Division I basketball Final Fours because of the complexity of those bids, Jarnecke says. All information must be submitted electronically, and all bids must have a member institution or conference associated with the bid as a host or co-host. Also, hosts are required to submit a budget and respond to the bid specifications. Prospective hosts were also encouraged to include photos, videos, schematics, letters of support and other information to offer more context to their bid.

Jarnecke says all sports committees used the same priorities in their bid evaluations.

"Certainly, the student-athlete experience is of paramount importance," he says. "While open to some level of interpretation, elements of this experience include quality of competition facilities

and amenities; quality and proximity of infrastructure, like hotels, airport, restaurants, and entertainment; and opportunity to build an audience.

“In addition to the student-athlete experience, factors of financial matters, hosting experience, adherence to bid specifications, fan/sponsor opportunities and geography were all important considerations as well.

The NCAA also wanted to focus on economies and efficiencies of scale to allow for prospective hosts to prioritize their own interest on specific championships in specific years, as well as the opportunity to create a strategy for ideally hosting multiple events over the four year period. As a result, multiple championships over the four years went to Louisville, St. Louis, Kansas City and Columbus, Ohio, among others.

Jarnecke says the NCAA provided bid parameters to limit or eliminate lobbying of committee members, so the creativity of presentations has flourished. Videos, portfolios, special events to show a location’s excitement—all were employed by prospective cities. Jarnecke says some hopefuls’ bids were dead in the water.

“In a few instances, bids were submitted without doing much research on the championship, so prospective hosts did not meet the minimum bid specifications and had their bids disqualified,” says Jarnecke. “They would have saved themselves a great deal of time by reviewing the bid specs in full before responding.”

Indiana Sports Corporation’s Baughman says the work starts when her organization decides whether to bid.

“We do a lot of research on the front end, and if we decide to bid, we aggressively pursue the event,” she says. “We put a lot of effort into bids and you want to see that work pay off. Our industry continues to become more and more competitive as cities and states invest in sporting events and venues. It’s never fun to lose a bid, but we always know that we put our best foot forward. Sometimes the event owner just feels we aren’t the best partner for their event at that particular time. It’s difficult, but that’s how competitive our industry has become. We learn from every attempt and try to improve in meeting an event owners’ needs.”

<http://www.ncaa.com/news/ncaa/article/2014-01-27/finalists-2017-2020-mens-and-womens-final-four-hosts-named>